

From: Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

Sarah Hammond, Interim Corporate Director Children, Young people and Education

To: County Council – 14 July 2022

Subject: OFSTED INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: The Ofsted inspection of Children's Services in Kent under the Inspecting Local Authority Children's services (ILACs) framework took place over a 3 week period in May 2022. Kent's last inspection in 2017 found Kent was providing "Good" services to children. This meant that any further inspection under the ILACS framework should have taken place over two weeks. In February 2022, Kent was informed by Ofsted that in accordance with a change in policy, when inspected, a full standard 3 week inspection would take place, taking into account special circumstances for "Good" authorities. The size of Kent qualified for such special circumstances and so Kent was subject to the most rigorous inspection framework involving seven Ofsted inspectors reviewing all aspects of the Council's statutory safeguarding, corporate parenting and family support functions. On 5th July 2022, Ofsted published their ILACs report rating Kent County Council 'Outstanding' for overall effectiveness in providing children's services.

Recommendation(s):

County Council is asked to NOTE the content of the report and the significant work of all the staff who contributed to this very positive outcome.

1. Outcome of the Inspection

- 1.1 On 5th July 2022, Ofsted published their ILACs report rating Kent County Council 'Outstanding' for overall effectiveness in providing children's services—the highest grade that can be awarded. The report is attached as appendix 1.
- 1.2 Within this overall rating, Ofsted graded KCC's children's services against three judgements:
 - I. The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families – Outstanding
 - II. The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection – Good
 - III. The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers – Outstanding

2. Summary of the Ofsted report, including quotes directly from the report

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: - Outstanding

- 2.1 Ofsted found that in the face of the pandemic and high numbers of unaccompanied minors, “support for vulnerable children in Kent improved over a sustained period of time. Social work practice is consistently good and often better, meaning children are well protected and cared for”.
- 2.2 “The politicians in Kent County Council are committed to championing the needs of children and this is backed by sound financial investment. Alongside the director of children’s services and his senior management team, the lead member for children’s services and the head of paid services keep themselves well appraised of key challenges and service issues, exercising appropriate oversight and scrutiny. Council departments and sectors work together to ensure all their services positively impact on children who need the council’s support”.
- 2.3 “The local authority provides appropriate steer and brings strong leadership to the local multi-agency safeguarding partnership”. “The focus on learning from serious incidents persisted and is clearly evidenced”.
- 2.4 “Leaders successfully secured a whole-county housing protocol across the 12 district councils. However, leaders accept that the individual response to children aged 16 and 17 who are facing homelessness is an area which requires further work”.
- 2.5 “Leaders across Kent County Council demonstrate they are ambitious parents to children in their care”. “The recently appointed chair brings genuine care and passion to the role and a new perspective which builds on the successes of the previous chair”.
- 2.6 “The council routinely seeks to learn from children through online surveys, complaints and other mechanisms to hear their views”. “The Children in Care Council is routinely consulted and children are assured their voices are listened to”.
- 2.7 “Senior leaders and managers have access to an extensive array of performance information and data reports” and “quality assurance activities effectively shape organisational change and refresh practice, policy and learning”. “There is a strong focus on and a commitment to workforce development”.
- 2.8 “Workforce pressures in Kent present extreme challenges for senior leaders and managers. Leaders accept caseloads are too high in parts of the service and are not sustainable”. They take steps to alleviate workload pressures. Support strategies include “redirecting non-case-holding staff, assistant social workers and early help practitioners to provide consistent support with social work tasks”.

- 2.9 “All staff who spoke to inspectors were rightly proud of the work they do and proud of the progress they make with children and families to improve their situations. They speak highly and very positively about working in Kent, they ‘love’ working for Kent, and they feel supported by their colleagues and valued by managers. Most say they are provided with regular, reflective individual and case supervision, which helps them drive forward plans for children and explore the challenges and barriers which may prevent progress being made”. Staff feel they have “excellent training and opportunities for further development and career progression. Many staff have worked for Kent for many years”.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: – Good

- 2.10 Workers from the Early Help and social work teams spend time getting to know the children they work with; they try to understand the difficulties they and their parents are facing to come up with a good plan to support them.
- 2.11 When families need help with the care of their children, or there are worries about the safety of a child, they get good help and support from children’s social care services.
- 2.12 Workers are good at contacting family friends and other family members who are important to children to see if they can help to support children and their parents. This support often helps children to remain in their own family and be supported by people they already know.
- 2.13 Inspectors observed workers do their best for children. Children are regularly visited by their workers to see how they are and to talk about things that are important to them. Social workers work together with children’s carers and others to ensure children feel safe and live in homes which meet their needs
- 2.14 Unaccompanied Asylum- Seeking Children are given somewhere to live, they are provided with good care and support to help them to settle in this country and to make good progress. Even when capacity is reached, Kent still has a strong focus on vulnerability of the young people.
- 2.15 Elective home education is a trend rising over time – appropriately robust measures are in place for contacting families who elect to home educate, providing support when needed and monitoring over time. When it is in the best interest of the child, they provide appropriate support and challenge to return children to school.
- 2.16 Although Ofsted did not identify any inadequate experiences of children’s services or that required improvement during the inspection, individual responses to some children aged 16 and 17 who were potentially facing homelessness is an area which requires further work. This in addition to high social work caseloads which ultimately prevented Kent being awarded Outstanding for this category.

The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers – Outstanding

- 2.17 Ofsted found that “children come into Kent County Council’s care when this is the most appropriate plan for them. For most children, this happens in a

planned and timely way. Children are supported to live in homes, including adoptive homes, with their brothers and sisters when this meets their wishes and is in their best interests". "Most children leave care in a positive and planned way, either through achieving permanence or returning home to live with their parent".

- 2.18 "Children's need for long-term stability and emotional security is well understood and embedded in the culture of children's social work teams. Children's long-term living arrangements are considered early and permanence planning arrangements keep permanence plans on track and enable children to understand they can stay and feel settled where they live".
- 2.19 "Review meeting records are addressed and written to the child. There is a strong commitment to ensuring review meetings are tailored individually to each child. Children spoke about being able to chair their review meetings, with feedback including this 'sometimes works well and sometimes doesn't work so well'. Children told inspectors their reviews and other meetings frequently take place at school during lesson time, which meant that they sometimes missed lessons they really like".
- 2.20 "Children are only placed in unregistered placements if the authority is not able to find appropriate placements which are registered to meet these children's complex needs. These arrangements are rightly considered as unlawful and highly monitored by senior leaders, with higher levels of visiting and support as efforts are made to promote and ensure registration or move children on".
- 2.21 "Disabled children and young people who are in the care of the local authority are provided with exceptional support from their social workers, whose care and commitment shines through their work".
- 2.22 "Kent routinely employs care experienced adults as young apprentices in the council's participation service. Several young people have successfully completed their apprenticeships and are now in employment with the service. The impact they have is a particular strength of the council".
- 2.23 Care Leavers:-Passionate and committed workers who know their young person, making a positive impact on other lives building relationships with their young person. Workers are invested in young people's success. UASC Care Leavers: great support with their immigration status, in terms of their application and ensure interpreters are involved. Support is tailored to their needs. Workers share the frustration around the immigration status of the young people
- 2.24 Fostering services:- Inspectors praised the approach used to support our foster carers, with mentoring, training, skills to foster and good incentives. This is a very respectful and empowering way to develop people's skills, leading to strong retention of carers and a high number of children placed within KCC placements.
- 2.25 Adoption partnership: Inspectors noted good governance, regular feedback and really positive progress in the establishment of the partnership. The

service was assessed as being integrated, with more diversity, greater skills and knowledge, and a bigger pool of adopters now available.

- 2.26 Virtual School Kent:- Driven by sense of purpose, robust strategic relationships with SEN (special educational needs) service and with schools. Schools talk positively about the support they get from VSK.

3. Impact

- 3.1 Kent County Council is one of only 20 Local Authorities from a cohort of 154 in England to acquire an “Outstanding” rating. This is a very significant achievement and places Kent County Council firmly within the upper fifth of high performing authorities. This achievement is the culmination of more than 10 years’ work, which has taken our Children’s Services from Inadequate in 2010 to Outstanding in 2022. The impact for the safety and wellbeing of Kent’s children is very significant and provides a substantial platform from which the Council and the CYPE Directorate can now respond to other existing challenges and new Government ambitions for Children and Young People moving forward.
- 3.2 The Council should be proud of the work of all the staff who contributed to this very positive outcome.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 There are two specific areas of development in relation to Social Work caseloads and children aged 16 and 17 who are facing homelessness which will be taken forward. An action plan will be produced by November 2022, although work has already begun in addressing both areas with over 60 newly qualified social workers joining the council over the next two months.
- 4.2 Whilst delighted with the outcome of the May Inspection, Children’s Services will continue to strive for improvement, consolidating areas of strong practice to ensure all children in Kent consistently benefit from high quality social care and early help support when it is required.

5. Recommendations:

- 9.1 County Council is asked to NOTE the content of the report and the significant work of all the staff who contributed to this very positive outcome.

10. Background Documents

None

11. Contact details

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